

CLAIMS

1. A method for providing a graphical chat user interface on a display associated with a multimedia apparatus, comprising the steps of:
 - 5 – receiving a broadcast video signal;
 - receiving text communications from at least one other television viewer;
 - displaying said broadcast video signal in a first display area on said display;
 - 10 – determining the identity of the television programming displayed in said first display area;
 - determining the theme of said television programming identity;
 - selecting a background image from an image database, said background image matching said theme;
 - 15 – inserting said background image as a background in a second display area on said display; and
 - superimposing said text communications on top of said background image in said second display area.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
 - 20 – selecting at least one avatar image from said image database, said at least one avatar image being representative of one of said other television viewers; and
 - displaying said at least one avatar image superimposed on top of said background image in said second display area.

3. The method of claim 1 or 2, wherein the steps of selecting a background image from an image database, said background image matching said theme and inserting said background image as a background in a second display area on said display are performed at least two times during the broadcast of said television programming.
4. The method of claim 1 or 2, wherein said image database is residing in a memory device associated with said multimedia apparatus.
5. The method of claim 1 or 2, wherein said image database is residing on the Internet.
- 10 6. The method of claim 1 or 2, further comprising the step of:
 - downloading said image database via the multiplexed broadcast stream containing said broadcast video signal.
7. The method of claim 2, wherein text communications received from said one of said other television viewers is superimposed on top of said background image in said second display area close to the displayed said at least one avatar image.
- 15 8. The method of claim 7, wherein said text communications received from said one of said other television viewers remains superimposed on top of said background image in said second display area close to the displayed said at least one avatar image until another text communications is received from said one of said other television viewers.
- 20 9. The method of claim 2, further comprising the steps of:

- receiving an action input from at least one television viewer associated with one avatar image currently displayed in said second display area;
- selecting at least one action image from said image database,

5 said at least one action image corresponding to said action input; and

- displaying said at least one action image superimposed on top of said background image in said second display area.

10. The method of claim 2, further comprising the steps of:

- receiving an action input from at least one television viewer

10 associated with one avatar image currently displayed in said second display area;

- selecting at least one action image from said image database, said at least one action image corresponding to said action input; and
- displaying said at least one action image superimposed on top

15 of said television programming in said first display area.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the at least one action image is transparently superimposed.

12. The method of claim 2, further comprising the steps of:

- creating at least one record associated with said multimedia

20 apparatus, said at least one record comprising a list of preferred other television viewers; and

- superimposing text communications and displaying at least one avatar image associated with at least one other television viewer included in said record, and superimposing text communications and displaying at least

one avatar image associated with at least one other television viewer not included in said record.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein said at least one other television viewer not included in said record is watching television
5 programming determined to have the same television programming identity as the television programming displayed in said first display area.

14. The method of claim 12, further comprising the steps of:
– receiving a change input from the television viewer associated with said multimedia apparatus;
10 – replacing the avatar image of at least one other television viewer with an avatar image of at least one other television viewer based on said change input.

15. A multimedia apparatus comprising a first receiving means for receiving a broadcast video signal, a second receiving means for receiving text communications originating from a plurality of multimedia apparatuses, and for receiving a plurality of images, a memory means for storing said plurality of images, a determination means for determining the identity of the television programming tuned to by said first receiving means, and for determining the theme of said television programming identity, a display means for displaying said broadcast video signal in a first display area, for displaying a background image, retrieved from said memory means and matching said theme, in a second display area, and for displaying said text communications superimposed on said background image in said second display area.

16. The multimedia apparatus of claim 15, wherein said display means also are arranged for displaying a plurality of avatar images, retrieved from said memory means and each avatar image corresponding to one of said plurality of multimedia apparatuses, superimposed on said background image in said second display area.

17. The multimedia apparatus of claim 16, wherein said second receiving means also are arranged for receiving an action input from one of said plurality of multimedia apparatuses associated with an avatar image currently displayed in said second display area, and said display means also are arranged for displaying an action image, retrieved from said memory means and corresponding to the character of said action input, superimposed on said background image in said second display area.

18. A computer program product, disposed on a computer readable storage medium, comprising computer readable program code means for causing a computer to perform the method of claim 1.

19. A computer program product, directly loadable into the internal memory of a digital computer, comprising software code portions for performing the method according to claim 1 when said product is run on a computer.